

'Tale Engineering':¹ Agatha Christie and the Aftermath of the Second World War

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Abstract

The 'golden age' of clue-puzzle detective fiction is usually considered to end in 1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War. Yet Agatha Christie, the most high-profile and successful exponent of the form, continued to produce bestselling novels until her death in 1976. This essay examines three novels from the immediate postwar period to consider how she adapted her writing to negotiate a changing world and evolving fashions in genre fiction. Engaging with grief, demobilisation, gender, citizenship and the new fears of the atomic age, Christie proves unexpectedly attentive to the anxieties of a new modernity.

Keywords

Agatha Christie, crime fiction, Second World War, postwar, Cold War, gender

Christie's wartime mysteries superintend contemporary battles from a distance and with an Austenesque pattern of radical displacement, not recognising the war as itself, but representing its effect in terms of disruptions to the normal balance of gender and social power.²

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Unlike the clue-puzzle form, of which she was arguably the most well-known and successful exponent, Agatha Christie – and her books – survived the Second World War unscathed. This essay asks how she succeeded in sustaining a residual genre form in the face of the rising popularity of thrillers, spy stories and police procedurals, and explores the extent to which her novels of the post-Second World War period register the effects of trauma and social change. Steven Knight's contention that Christie's wartime writing superintends the contemporary from a distance is equally pertinent for war's aftermath, and Christie's writing can be seen to exemplify British culture's reticence in recognising the traumatic impact of the conflict. As Adam Piette has argued, the public rhetoric of the war had an enervating and debilitating impact on the 'private imagination': it was a conflict that, through its scarcely conceivable scale and the remorselessness of its exhortatory voices, threatened to defeat articulation.³ Elizabeth Bowen, writing at the time, confirms the distorting, all-pervasive influence of what she termed 'war climate'. In an age of 'lucid abnormality', she observed, all writing, irrespective of subject matter, was shaped by the pressures of conflict.⁴ In this context, some writers simply abandoned the struggle to find a voice for the unprecedented experience of total war and its complex impact on the psyche. Others, by contrast, sought refuge in imaginative displacement, dealing with the conflict and its aftermath through fictions of history, childhood and fantasy.⁵ The novels of Agatha Christie similarly engage in a tangential negotiation of cultural anxieties. Her prolific output in the war and postwar years is both a product of 'war climate', and a skilled example of what Umberto Eco terms 'tale engineering': the pragmatic configuration of narrative to speak to, and through, the common opinions of an imagined readership. Christie's writing thus responds to the urgent pressures of wartime, and postwar readjustment, while seemingly doing nothing of the sort. This duality matters. The comforts of an 'Agatha Christie' emerge in part from her novels' recognition of the contradictory amalgamation of nostalgia and modernity that underpinned the hopes, aspirations and fears of postwar reconstruction. They also, in their simultaneous exposure and refusal of pain, offer an oblique negotiation of post-traumatic states that British culture was singularly ill-equipped to acknowledge.⁶

While a number of critics, most notably Alison Light, have explored the ways in which Christie's fictions engage with the socio-political climate of the interwar years, less has been written on her response to the Second World War. This neglect can probably be attributed to the critical priority long afforded to the 'golden age' of interwar crime writing and to the first generation of canonical modernists: across the literary spectrum, the writing of the late 1940s and early 1950s has only recently begun to receive the attention it deserves.⁷ It is also the case that Christie herself is powerfully associated with that 'golden age'. Her writing of the 1920s represents a significant formal innovation; her writing of the 1950s seems, superficially, to be more of the same. Yet this appearance is deceptive. The broader field of crime fiction changed considerably in the late 1940s and 1950s, and Christie responded. Fresh insight into her work and its relationship to the postwar can thus

be gained by setting her novels alongside these new developments in the genre, rather than reading them solely in the context of her earlier work.

Understanding Christie's interwar fiction is, however, a pre-requisite for examining the changes wrought by the Second World War. In the interwar years, from *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) to *Sad Cypress* (1939), Christie tidily resolves death, explaining corpses and restoring communities to order through the production of a convenient criminal scapegoat. It is no co-incidence that most of her novels also include a symbolic marriage. Described by Alison Light as a 'literature of convalescence', this fiction was, in its artfully distanced way, a space of grief, mourning and repair: a reassuring locus within which losses could be resolved and the social fabric restored.⁸ It was also – for a genre premised upon violence – remarkably bloodless. Light's persuasive analysis argues that Christie's response to the First World War was anti-sentimental and innovative in its 'retreat from old-fashioned notions of the heroic'.⁹ Christie was not alone in this approach and Light concludes that 'both male and female writers in the period ... found a kind of modernity in making fun of heroes'.¹⁰ Yet the seeds of the changes that would find full formulation after the Second World War were already evident in the 1930s. In the face of a steadily worsening international situation – wars in Abyssinia, Spain, China – writers such as Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham began to introduce a more serious tone into their fictions. In Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935), Lord Peter Wimsey is less of a fool and more of a diplomat; in Allingham's *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938) the eccentric Albert Campion retrenches into a curmudgeonly conservatism better suited to the demands of an imperilled national order. Once the Second World War took hold, those detectives fit for active service were recruited for the war effort, and those not fit to serve found their crime scenes littered with war-damaged individuals.¹¹ As these adaptations indicate, the clue-puzzle novel is a resilient form, and it did not lose its appeal for a wide readership, but it is nonetheless the case that the war years and the 1940s more generally mark the end of its status as a locus of innovation or modernity. Rather, this was a period that ushered in the 'normalisation', or even the decline, of the classical formula, and the emergence (or return) of such variant forms and sub-genres as psychological realism and suspense fiction, police procedurals and spy fiction.

Amongst these variant forms, it was the reinvention and resurgence of the thriller that most changed the temper of popular fiction. In the context of demobilisation, making fun of heroes was no longer the order of the day; rather, fiction searched, repeatedly, for narratives that would restore and reassert masculine agency. In the cinema this translated initially into the so-called 'spiv cycle', a series of late 1940s films focused on anti-heroes oppressed by the boredom of peacetime.¹² In fiction it saw the emergence of a newly violent sub-genre, the formula of which bears little resemblance to golden age plotting. Its characteristic features, as exemplified in the 1940s and 1950s by writers such as Helen McInnes and Hammond Innes, and developed with variations in the late 1950s and 1960s by such bestsellers as Alastair MacLean and Desmond Bagley, include: a physically,

psychologically or socially 'wounded' hero, somehow excluded from postwar culture and society and at odds with the world around him; direct physical threats to the hero and to anything he holds dear; plots that emerge from wartime secrets and conspiracy, suggesting that the war itself remains unresolved; a fascination with technological and/or natural forces (from aeroplanes to avalanches); and narratives that demand these motley 'disabled' heroes confront and overwhelm a mesmerizing male other, usually in a more or less apocalyptic climax. In place of the homosocial bond much cherished in wartime narratives – in particular in the cinema, where the 'group hero' flourished – we find the restoration of heteronormativity.¹³ Rather than finding security in the male group, the lonely hero finds solace in the arms of a good woman who will permit physical or mental healing, and ultimately social reintegration.

These postwar generic changes suggest a transition from detection as a predominantly 'feminised' sceptical form,¹⁴ to crime fiction as a re-masculinised genre featuring younger, active male heroes whose narratives encompass risk, reward and – crucially – a reinstatement of agency. On the surface it seems hard to imagine how such a formula might be adapted by Christie, a writer possessed of two decrepit old detectives and a distinct preference for murder as a domestic art.¹⁵ But this underestimates her ability to adapt the clue-puzzle formula to process postwar preoccupations. It also ignores the diversity of her output. Between 1940 and 1960 she wrote Poirots and Marples, assorted free-standing thrillers, a number of stage plays and several 'Mary Westmacott' novels. She deployed Tommy and Tuppence, Superintendent Battle, and a range of inquisitive young investigators, both male and female. There is something of a chameleon sensibility about this range of writing, a reminder that Christie, in spite of her immediately recognisable style, was adept at literary mimicry.¹⁶ This adaptive ability, and her responsiveness to the cultural climate, is clearly evident in her depiction of anxieties surrounding dysfunctional masculinity. I will discuss the disruptive commando David Hunter in *Taken at the Flood* (1948) later, but other examples of inadequacy or pathology include a case of Oedipal arrested development in *Mrs McGinty's Dead* (1952), the megalomania and misguided hero-worship at the heart of *They Do It With Mirrors* (1952) and the childlike fighter pilot stuck in the past who wanders aimlessly through *4.50 From Paddington* (1957). There is little here that suggests confidence in the resilience of modern masculinity. But Christie does not simply replicate the demob thrillers of her contemporaries, rather she appropriates and adapts this 'fashionable' narrative of masculine regeneration: she plays with it, feminises it, and creates in the process a series of literally or metaphorically demobilised women who share the same malaise and, crucially, the same relationship to *risk* that characterises the heroes of the postwar 'male' thriller.

A final consideration in exploring the relationship between Christie and the postwar is the critical reception she has been afforded as a writer. A tension exists in Christie scholarship between those who argue for what Alison Light calls a 'refusal of seriousness', and those who note the emphasis on evil and individual responsibility in her work, a profound moral seriousness underpinning the

superficial lightness of her puzzles. Light argues that Christie's popularity is indicative of a rejection of the 'romantic languages of national pride' in favour of a more 'domestic and more private' view of self and nation that was integral to the reinscription of the 'national temperament' in the interwar years.¹⁷ The superficial distraction of the clue-puzzle mystery took the pain out of death within a wounded, post-traumatic society, and Christie was the supreme practitioner of this art, producing fictions characterised by post-modern levels of instability and textual play. To Light, when Christie does invoke a language of good and evil, it is strangely unconvincing.¹⁸ Marion Shaw and Sabine Vanacker, by contrast, argue that it is possible to see the Marple stories as 'Morality Tales' of the kind applauded by Christie in her autobiography. Marple is 'a kind of social conscience', and the novels, predominantly written after the Second World War, 'react with conservative irritation to the new psychological theories because such theories tend to deny evil and excuse the criminal and because they threaten the rationale on which detective fiction of this type depends'.¹⁹ Evidence can be found to support both these approaches – the texts themselves are contradictory – but Shaw and Vanacker's attribution to Christie of a 'conservative' irritation in the face of change raises pertinent questions for any analysis of her later texts.²⁰ Did age and the social transformations of postwar generate a transition from modernity to conservatism, or is the relationship of her writing to its context more nuanced and uncertain? How did Christie register the advent of the atomic age or the politics of the cold war, and to what effect?²¹ The dominant critical focus on the figure of Miss Marple provides one set of answers; rather different possibilities emerge from other elements of her oeuvre. This essay will thus explore three non-Marple novels that demonstrate Christie's chameleon generic adjustments, and suggest some of the aspects of postwar culture she felt the need to 'superintend'.²²

Coming to Grief: Christie and the Aftermath of the Second World War

The Hollow (1946) is an immediate postwar text, so close to the conflict that it could, in some respects, still be at war. The *mise-en-scène* is bizarrely crowded with firearms: guns are ubiquitous – hidden in desk draws, egg baskets, hedges – and pretty much everyone knows how to use them.²³ The Hollow itself, country home of Sir Henry and Lady Lucy Angkatell, is a refuge where various members of the Angkatell family and their relatives come to recuperate after bursts of activity in the public sphere. Henrietta Savernake, a talented sculptor, comes from the battle to create art; John Christow, a skilful doctor, from the battle to save lives. Midge, another cousin, comes exhausted from a battle for financial survival as a shop assistant; Edward, the man she loves comes from a rather peculiar battle against ennui: he is so overwhelmed by the active, thrusting masculinity of John that any form of self-assertion seems beyond him. Sullen cousin David comes, oozing resentment, from the rigours of class warfare, and Gerda, John's very ordinary

wife, comes to do battle with her self, unable to cope with the careless fluency and social graces of the privileged, well-to-do Angkatells. The house boasts a number of devoted servants, and the neighbours are a Hollywood actress, and – improbably, but conveniently – Hercule Poirot. Within the framework of my concern with postwar readjustment and generic form, two female characters stand out. The first is Lucy Angkatell, who channels in this novel a distinctive type of callousness that was a notable feature of earlier wartime fiction, in particular, *The Moving Finger* (1943). Indeed, the later book echoes the earlier. At the end of *The Moving Finger*, the timely intervention of Miss Marple has identified the murderer and restored order to the community, leaving the focalising hero – a wounded pilot – to the prospect of marriage and happiness. Just for the briefest of moments, though, the novel pauses to let him remember, and dismiss, the dead: ‘I remembered that Agnes’ boy hadn’t been very fond of her and that Mrs. Symmington hadn’t been very nice to Megan and, what the hell? We’ve all got to die sometime!’²⁴ In *The Hollow*, almost identical sentiments are given to Lucy, only in this case she’s talking about the central victim, John Christow, a relative for whom she might have been expected to care: ‘Oh, well, everyone has to die sometime. . . . I never think one ought to attach too much importance to *anybody*.’²⁵

This statement presents a fascinating continuity of callousness, and a shift in attitudes to death that is also evident in Lucy’s speech about the business of investigating murder:

‘It all seems such a fuss, doesn’t it?’ she said. ‘I mean, all this hounding people down. I don’t suppose whoever it was shot John Christow really meant to shoot him – not seriously, I mean. If it was Gerda, I’m sure she didn’t. In fact, I’m really surprised that she didn’t miss – it’s the sort of thing that one would expect of Gerda. And she’s really a very nice kind creature. And if you go and put her in prison and hang her, what on earth is going to happen to the children? If she did shoot John, she’s probably dreadfully sorry about it now. . . . Sometimes I don’t think you policemen *think* of these things.’²⁶

Aside from the deceptively unfocused style, the passage demonstrates Lucy’s unsentimental practicality, her low opinion of Gerda, and her distance from conventional attitudes towards the law. Lucy is a type also seen in the work of Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham. Lord Peter Wimsey’s mother, the Dowager Duchess, for example, is characterised by a habit of perceptive lateral thinking expressed in similar stream of consciousness mode, while the Marchioness at the centre of Allingham’s 1945 novel *Coroner’s Pidgin* is a dangerous, disruptive figure, with no respect for the law or for the lower class agents obliged to enforce it. And it is no coincidence that Allingham’s novel appears in the same late-war moment as Christie’s. Both *Coroner’s Pidgin* and *The Hollow* depend for their plots on convoluted strategies of misdirection undertaken in an attempt to confound a police investigation. They are novels that involve bringing chaos to order and due process through the staging of events. While Christie’s Lucy Angkatell

deploys what is described as her ‘deadly power of inconsequent suggestion’ – evident in the quotation above – Allingham moves closer to farce by making her Marchioness responsible for the deposit of a corpse in detective Albert Campion’s bed.²⁷ In both cases, the suspects act on the investigation, rather than being the objects of detective enquiry, and their performance – the restaging of death – suggests both that murder has lost its capacity of shock (and indeed to function as an adequate motor of plot), and that British society, after the imposition of wartime controls, is experiencing a sort of return of the repressed. Be it catharsis or carnival, characters like Lucy Angkatel appear as free radicals: they operate outside patriarchal control and beyond inhibition. Lucy speaks what others only fantasise about saying, communicating through a mode of what might be termed ‘weaponised politeness’.²⁸

Lucy’s extreme lack of conventional piety, or any hypocritical desire to pretend she cares, can be read in a variety of ways. It might be seen as a self-protective strategy typical of wartime ‘business as usual’ attitudes, or as a distinctively post-war response to government encouragement to get back to ‘normal’. Yet returning to ‘normality’ was easier said than done, as is demonstrated by *The Hollow*’s second significant female character, Henrietta Savernake. In the *Autobiography*, Christie observes that the book would have worked better without Hercule Poirot:

It was, of course, in some ways rather more of a novel than a detective story. *The Hollow* was a book I always thought I had ruined by the introduction of Poirot. I had got used to having Poirot in my books. . . .²⁹

It is not difficult to see why Christie felt this way, not least because, in Henrietta, she had an admirable protagonist. Henrietta is an independent, active, professional woman. She has the intelligence to act as a sounding board for John Christow’s medical theories and the perceptiveness to recognise the threat embodied by mindless worship of an ideal. This somewhat abstract insight is crucial to the plot, as is Henrietta’s capacity for action. Responding decisively in the face of threat, she evades the police, ties their investigation in knots and cleverly disguises the murder weapon in a piece of abstract art; she also drives her own car – a point of which much is made – and her confident relationship with this vehicle acts as a symbol of her self-possession and self-control. By the end of the novel she has variously filled the roles of suspect, detective and ‘antagonist’.³⁰ Only a timely intervention by Poirot prevents her from also becoming a victim.³¹

Henrietta’s experience throughout the book has been that of wartime:

For the last few weeks she had been strung up, excited, never relaxing for a moment. She had had a task to perform – a task laid on her by John. But now that was over . . . she experienced the terrible weariness of the reaction.³²

Temporarily adrift, paralysed by ‘postwar’ bereavement, Henrietta goes to the hospital to visit John’s favourite patient, Mrs Crabtree, a stereotypically indomitable

working class woman, who in spite of her suffering will not let go of life. The parallel to 'people's war' mythology is evident, and in dialogue with the old woman, Henrietta finds the resilience to continue alone. The dead must be mourned, but the work of reconstruction remains to be done. And this is what Henrietta does, translating her grief for her dead lover from private pain to public memorial. At the book's end, she imagines a statue of remembrance: 'Grief... A veiled figure – its outlines barely perceptible... She could see the lines of it – tall, elongated, its sorrow hidden, revealed only by the long, mournful lines of the drapery.'³³ This is a remarkably apposite symbol for the mourning at work in the culture of postwar Britain. The psychoanalytic critic William Watkin observes that 'emotion is primarily a social construct' and that each culture has its own language and expressive possibilities through which the work of mourning might be articulated.³⁴ Mid-century, middle-class Britain, however, was characterised by the lack of such an emotional register, its dominant expressive modes of understatement, euphemism and banter contributing to a climate of restraint and repression. This is a culture that distrusts emotional fluency, especially in men, and expects the maintenance of a public façade that deflects interrogation. In this context, and indeed, in the context of Christie's own writing, Henrietta's grief stands out as exceptional: an effort to express pain beyond the bounds of cultural legitimacy, and something quite different from the post-First World War culture of convalescence so persuasively identified by Alison Light.³⁵

The Hollow, then, is a very immediate postwar novel. Implicitly located in a liminal society, suspended between war and peace, civilisation and regression (a concept evoked by Gerda's 'mindless worship' of her husband), it is preoccupied with both nostalgia and modernity. Characters' memories return repeatedly to the pre-lapsarian idyll of a shared childhood at Ainswick, an ideal of home untarnished by war and its legacies, but equally the book presents us with John Christow, a doctor figure far removed from the village General Practitioner usually found amongst the cast of Christie's fictions. Christow's dedication to an abstract ideal of public good and his admiration for the raw survival instincts of Mrs Crabtree make him one of an emergent group of scientist figures in Christie's writing who themselves occupy a border territory between the human and the inhumane. Christow's name is not accidental, but it is ambivalent. He is a great scientist and his death is a loss to society, but he is equally a monstrous egotist with a saviour complex, and there is undoubted irony in his murder by a disillusioned woman who had set him up as her 'god'.³⁶

The muted mood of *The Hollow* is indicative of Christie's sensitivity to the *Zeitgeist*, and the 'battles' it superintends are those of the weary late-war years. A second example of her chameleon adaptability, published two years later in 1948, tells a very different, and perhaps more characteristic, postwar tale: a story of strangers and outlaws.³⁷

Postwar: Strangers and Outlaws

Taken at the Flood is, in many ways, a typical clue-puzzle detective story: a family, a village, an inheritance; but it is also a portrait of the postwar, a romance and an

archetypal 'demob' narrative. Significantly, however, one of the maladjusted demobilised veterans is a woman, Lynn Marchmont. After a war spent in the WRENS, travelling the world, experiencing adventure and risking her life, Lynn has returned home to marry the man she left behind, farmer Rowley Cloade. Their secure and stable future, though, is jeopardised – not only by Lynn's doubts, but also by the death in the Blitz of Gordon Cloade, a wealthy childless relative who had led the family to believe they would have 'great expectations'. Shortly before his unexpected death, Gordon married a woman nearly forty years his junior and, in the excitement, neglected to rewrite his will. His fortune has, in consequence, gone to his young widow, Rosaleen. Into the village community, then, come two outsiders, Rosaleen Cloade and her controlling older brother, David Hunter, a former commando and symbol of the unassimilable residue of war:

Lynn saw at once why all the Cloades disliked him so much. She had met men of that stamp abroad. Men who were reckless and slightly dangerous. Men whom you couldn't depend upon. Men who made their own laws and flouted the universe. Men who were worth their weight in gold in a push – and who drove their C.O.s to distraction out of the firing line!³⁸

Lynn, herself alienated by her new outsider perspective, recognises her family's 'ill will', and is immediately, albeit reluctantly, attracted to the dangerous outlaw. Rowley Cloade cannot compete. Emasculated by his reserved occupation, and denied the fundamental male right of trial by combat, he is every bit as traumatised as the two service veterans. Through these characters, the archetypal masculine thriller narrative is embedded in the detective story, creating an uncanny sense of generic and cultural disturbance. The novel is full of half-glimpsed and misrecognised faces, reanimations, impersonations and a profound sense that home is no longer entirely 'heimlich'. *Taken at the Flood* is both familiar and 'other': it conforms to the conventions of classical detection – the investigation of murder exposes the venality of respectable middle-class society – and it adopts the pattern of the demob thriller in which a returning veteran finds the idealised home unwelcoming and corrupted. Yet although *Taken at the Flood* offers a more direct engagement with war's aftermath than *The Hollow*, it also retreats from the comparative emotional openness of the earlier novel. Christie's narrative takes her to the place of wartime trauma, but she will not admit its substance, using it rather as a device enabling conventional plotting. In *Taken at the Flood*, a servant girl pulled from a blitzed house is coerced into performing the role of Rosaleen Cloade. Her traumatic experiences are also used as camouflage, becoming a means of disguising her anxiety and poor performance. All her oddities are explained away by her experience of the Blitz, yet this experience is given little psychological substance, and no narrative sympathy. When the book does pause to acknowledge the impact of burial in a house full of the dead, Christie shuts down the possibilities opened up by Henrietta Savernake and aligns herself wholeheartedly with the

conventional expressive register of postwar Britain: 'Don't think about it. Don't remember' (45).³⁹

While keen not to talk about the psychological damage of war, *Taken at the Flood* has much to say about the material conditions of postwar England.⁴⁰ Characters struggle with taxation, bureaucracy, the cost of living and rationing, and Lynn – standing for a demobilised nation – finds herself adrift, and filled with nostalgia for an already mythologised wartime:

Days when duties were clearly defined, when life was planned and orderly – when the weight of individual decisions had been lifted from her... Was that really and truly what people were secretly feeling everywhere? Was that what, ultimately, war did to you? It was not the physical dangers – the mines at sea, the bombs from the air, the crisp *ping* of a rifle bullet as you drove over a desert track. No, it was the spiritual danger of learning how much easier life was if you ceased to think. . .⁴¹

There is here, in Lynn's speculations, and in the novel more generally, a tension between risk and responsibility, and Christie's narrative implies that it takes as much courage to resume the rigours of individual responsibility as it does to engage in combat. Christie is trying, then, to reinscribe risk, to rewrite it as a set of 'domestic' virtues, and to render non-combatant modes of being newly attractive and culturally viable. Yet, even as she attempts this – including in the process a paragraph-long celebration of the housewife as the true hero of the Second World War – it is clear that she cannot deconstruct the formulation of hegemonic masculinity, which after six years of conflict remains fundamentally dependent upon agency, power and domination.

This is evident in the novel's conclusion, which works strenuously to reinstate heteronormativity in place of disruptive wartime desire. The love triangle has progressed to the point of Lynn choosing David, perhaps because his war neurosis is so easily comprehensible to her. He is the archetype of the dysfunctional veteran, his tensions and desires relieved by action, and – counter-intuitively – after Lynn's time at war, he represents the comfortable and familiar.⁴² Rowley's problems, by contrast, emerge from the inescapable cultural association of masculinity, nation and war. In not going to war, being deprived of his 'right' to fight, Rowley is not allowed to be a man: 'I've missed what I ought to have had', he cries in frustration, 'I've missed my chance of fighting for my country.'⁴³ He is tormented by the gender inversion that has seen his 'girl' 'dress up in uniform', a telling choice of words that infantilises Lynn's military service and implies that WRENS are not 'real' service personnel. This would be bad enough, but Rowley has, in addition, been irreparably feminised by his status as 'the Man She Left Behind'.⁴⁴ His problems thus become an extreme manifestation of a larger cultural anxiety concerning the valorisation of non-combat masculinities, an anxiety evident in the raft of late 1940s and early 1950s film and fiction that attempted to imagine male agency outwith the parameters of combat. This reinscription initially had Ministry of Information authority. Humphrey Jennings's documentary *A Diary for Timothy* (1945) followed

four exemplary male figures – a pilot, an engine driver, a miner and a farmer – across the final months of the war, stressing through image and word the vital role played by men in reserved occupations.⁴⁵ By the 1950s this message had permeated feature films, as test pilots, scientists, engineers, explorers and policemen became alternative masculine models, valorised by the agency of ‘work’. For Rowley, though, farming has failed to provide that cultural endorsement, and as a typical English middle-class man, any verbal expression of his problems is out of the question. The only thing that can reinstate his masculine sense of self is violence. As the novel approaches its conclusion, he tries to strangle Lynn.

The situation is saved by the ‘deliberate anti-climax’ of Poirot’s arrival.⁴⁶ He has been a marginal figure in the narrative, and here, as in *The Hollow*, he appears at the last minute as an unlikely *deus ex machina*, stepping in politely to rescue the novel’s female agent from murderous attack. On this occasion, though, he also acts as cupid, and his ‘lecture on crime’ – the conventional revelation scene of the clue-puzzle mystery – simultaneously functions as an analytic intervention.⁴⁷ Under Poirot’s guidance, Rowley speaks, albeit only to describe the impossibility of speech: ‘I’ve sometimes thought I’m going mad – perhaps I *am* a bit mad. First Johnny going – and then the war – I – I can’t talk about things but sometimes I’d feel blind with rage...’⁴⁸ In Christie’s fantasy of postwar reconstruction, Lynn’s interest is reanimated by Rowley’s homicidal tendencies, and through risk the relationship is saved. Postwar society, suggests Christie, has an unhealthy fascination with danger, but rather than suggesting that this can be repressed or forgotten, she concludes that it has to find an outlet somewhere; and so, rather uncomfortably, she brings it into the bedroom. The clue-puzzle plot, meanwhile, is finally resolved through a double bluff: the deadly ‘war type’ is exactly that, and he becomes an ideal scapegoat for the murderous desires of the Cloades in general and Rowley in particular. Indeed, Rowley – like many actual veterans guilty of domestic violence in the aftermath of the war – is treated remarkably leniently.⁴⁹ He avoids punishment for his crimes on two key grounds. The first, that he was suffering from a damaged masculine ego, a form of non-combatant war neurosis, and the second, that he is needed for a battle on the home front. He will serve a valuable social purpose by taming the wandering wartime woman. He will re-insert Lynn into normative, domestic femininity: an ideal that is now explicitly underpinned by violence.

Of All That We Will Not Speak: Cold War Despair

The re-emergence of heteronormativity underpins a final example of Christie’s evolving relationship with the postwar: *Destination Unknown* (1954). Written and set in the 1950s, this represents a very different manifestation of postwar preoccupations. With the cold war firmly established, and austerity finally giving way to the affluence of the new Elizabethan era,⁵⁰ both society and its narratives were starting to change. Indeed, the 1950s would see the imperative to forget about the war mutate into a compulsion to revisit and reimagine its events. From Colin MacInnes’ *To the Victor the Spoils* (1950), to Evelyn Waugh’s *Sword of Honour*

trilogy (1952–61) and Alistair MacLean's *HMS Ulysses* (1956), the war would, over the course of the decade, be recollected in tranquillity and reconfigured as everything from satire to adventure. The war film similarly would become a mainstay of the British cinema box office. In these 'new' stories, women, who had been so visible in the films of the 1940s, were largely consigned to domestic and romantic roles, and the group hero was overshadowed by the middle-class heroic agent. In the 1940s, it took co-operation across class, region, temperament and gender to win a war; in the 1950s, a single inspired individual would suffice.⁵¹

In popular fiction, however, the decade arguably belonged to the spy. Christie had a track record with this genre, most notably in the light-hearted form of the Tommy and Tuppence adventures. But *Destination Unknown* is a very different type of book from the wartime *N or M?* (1941), and it is one that again demonstrates Christie's relationship to the generic *Zeitgeist*. Abandoning her serial characters, the novel focuses instead on a woman, Hilary Craven, attempting to escape the memory of a dead child and a broken marriage. She is, in female form, a version of the archetypal postwar thriller hero: with nothing left to live for and filled with 'cold despair', she begins the novel with a suicide attempt.⁵² She is rescued by the intervention of spy-master Mr Jessop, who – prompted by her uncanny resemblance to the wife of a missing nuclear scientist – offers her the prospect of a more adventurous death:

'... Has it got to be sleeping pills? ... I've already told you that they're not as romantic as they sound. Throwing yourself off a building isn't nice, either. You don't always die at once. And the same applies to falling under a train ...

'I'm suggesting another method. Rather a sporting method, really. There's some excitement in it, too. I'll be fair with you. There's just a hundred to one chance you mightn't die. But I don't believe under the circumstances, that you'd really object by that time.'⁵³

In place of sleeping pills, Jessop offers Hilary risk and purpose – or, perhaps, simply a concept of valuable 'work'. Hilary will impersonate Olive Betterton, killed in a convenient plane crash, in an attempt to trace her husband and a disturbing number of young scientists from all nations who have also disappeared. To achieve this, Hilary must be trained as an agent, and the extent to which she comes to occupy a 'masculinised' space is evident in the scenes of her reinvention. While outwardly being coached to become a new woman – Olive – she is praised in wholly masculine terms as protégé, pupil and tough adventurer.⁵⁴ Ironically, Hilary's mission will make her a microcosmic embodiment of many women's broader postwar experience. As a newly formed culturally 'masculine' agent, a citizen capable of responsible work in the public sphere, she will be obliged to impersonate domestic femininity. It is a drag act in the sense proposed by Judith Butler: a performance of gender norms that exposes the provisional and yet powerfully coercive nature of their construction.⁵⁵

The opening section of *Destination Unknown*, then, prepares an engaging female protagonist for a spy-adventure, and it might well have been a great (if short) book

had Christie left it there. She didn't, however, and the novel's early proto-feminist promise mutates into a generically uncertain plot that unwittingly reveals the limits of Christie's adaptability, and the scale of the cultural anxieties shaping postwar Britain.

The key figure of modernity in the novel is the scientist. Christie's emergent reservations about this type were evident in her ambivalent portrayal of John Christow in *The Hollow*: he was a figure obsessed with his work to the detriment of human relations. This type is developed and wholeheartedly condemned over the course of *Destination Unknown*. As the plot progresses, Hilary is taken on a journey with a group of motley scientists to the secret location where the missing geniuses are being kept in a 'gilded cage'.⁵⁶ Part luxury hotel, part communal work camp; part secret bunker and part science-fiction brave new world, it is unclear who or what is behind this scientific crucible. The compound embodies both comfort and threat, paradoxically looking back to the communal, purposeful life of wartime and invoking an imagined future of 'planning', a dystopian vision of government intervention that Christie was not alone in fearing.⁵⁷ In describing the scientists, however, Christie is careful to produce a hybrid mode of fanaticism. The various figures, predominantly male but including a notably obnoxious female fascist, spout doctrines that might loosely be seen to parody everything from communism to scientific enquiry itself, as in the case of the Frenchman Dr Barron:

To Dr Barron life was a passionate desire to be once more in his laboratory, to be able to calculate and experiment and work with unlimited money and unlimited resources. To work for what? She doubted if he ever put that question to himself. He spoke to her once of the powers of destruction that he could let loose on a vast continent, which could be contained in one little phial. She had said to him:

'But could you ever *do* that? Actually really do it?'

And he replied, looking at her with faint surprise:

'Yes. Yes, of course, if it became necessary . . . It would be amazingly interesting to see the exact course, the exact progress . . . there's so much more to know, so much more to find out.'⁵⁸

Barron's irresponsible scientific curiosity is divorced from social, moral and ethical considerations, and far from the ideals of enlightenment rationality. Indeed, the novel's scientists are refigured as emotionally unstable and 'easily unbalanced': the epitome of feminine stereotype. The 'man of science', we are told by the staff psychologist,

is not the cool, calm individual he is made out to be in fiction. In fact . . . between a first-class tennis player, an operatic prima-donna and a nuclear physicist there is really very little difference as far as emotional instability goes.⁵⁹

In this faintly absurd act of stereotyping Christie critiques a mode of almost pathological rationality: a hypermasculinity of the intellect so extreme it becomes the hysterical other it most obviously fears.

As this suggests, the novel experiences a degree of gender trouble as it tries to negotiate postwar subjectivities, and this difficulty is particularly evident in its attempt to imagine what a woman might want or be within this new modernity. In a default setting of conventional heteronormativity, Christie imagines that this scientific utopia would be equipped with 'technical and support staff', including a fashion department for the women brought along to service the needs of their husbands, and prostitutes for those men without wives.⁶⁰ And for all that the male scientists are exposed as fragile and emotionally vulnerable, women remain categorised as both socially and intellectually different. They are adaptive realists rather than idealists, capable of making the best of any given situation, but needing such distractions as bridge, fashion and cinema to survive.⁶¹ It is a significant transition from the early pages of the novel where Hilary is rehabilitated through a concept of purposeful work, but it is wholly in line with the gender conservatism of 1950s popular culture. Irrespective of developments in women's actual working lives, film and fiction predominantly suggested their fundamental source of satisfaction emerged from the support of husband and family. Within this framework, the private and domestic override public agency, and *Destination Unknown* is 'engineered' to conform to this paradigm. Female scientists remain background figures and Hilary's career in espionage becomes a transitional phase between her first and second marriages.

The novel also experiences a degree of national trouble, struggling to absorb the implications of a changing global order. In this *Destination Unknown* finds itself curiously in alignment with the structures of the decade's most notable popular fictional success: the James Bond narratives of Ian Fleming.⁶² As Umberto Eco influentially argues, in the Manichean world of Fleming's writing, the cold war opposition of capitalism and communism is figured as a conflict of individualism versus planning.⁶³ Bond villains always have an enormous, complex plan and an army of minions waiting to put it into action, while Bond, the inspired individual, defeats them through initiative, improvisation and a few nifty gadgets. The Christie of *Taken at the Flood* expressed her distrust of planning and social centralisation in her depiction of the difficulty of resuming individual responsibility in the aftermath of war. In *Destination Unknown* she pursues this theme by depicting communal life as narcotic and destructive, and by suggesting that this entire 'criminal' social-scientific project can be brought down by a single inspired individual: Hilary. Hilary, like Bond, gets a bit of help from an American agent, but this is a marriage of convenience not an ideological allegiance. Christie, again rather like Fleming, cleaves to a vision of Britain's 'third power' status that is here manifest in a nostalgic desire for the modes of being

that – in myth if not reality – won Britain the war. In other words, inspired improvisation and muddle:

She wanted to say:

‘Why do you decry the world we live in? There are good people in it. Isn’t muddle a better breeding ground for kindness and individuality than a world order that’s imposed, a world order that may be right to-day and wrong to-morrow? I would rather have a world of kindly, faulty, human beings, than a world of superior robots who’ve said good-bye to pity and understanding and sympathy.’⁶⁴

The superficial modernity of *Destination Unknown*’s generic play, then, disguises a celebration of specifically British virtues *and* the covert deployment of traditional generic forms. The novel’s conclusion hangs upon neither modern spying nor gothic excess. Rather, the whole panoply of modernity – mesmeric Directors, atomic secrets and the creed of youth – turns out to be a sham, a performance disguising the operation of capitalism. It is not a communist dictator, nor a fascist, nor even a mad scientist who is behind it all, but a megalomaniac financier who wants to corner the market in brains.

Christie’s novel, then, slips somewhat uncomfortably between the conventions of spy fiction, the torments of gothic confinement and the terrors of dystopian science fiction before, in the end, returning to the comforting conventions of the clue-puzzle. Missing scientist Tom Betterton turns out to be a domestic murderer, who had killed his first wife and stolen her scientific discoveries. Hilary, meanwhile, completes the conventional journey of 1950s femininity: marriage to helpful FBI agent Andy, who has leapt to her rescue disguised, to the horror of the modern reader, in black face. The improbability, never mind the discomfort, of this intervention confirms the perception that *Destination Unknown* is a novel that loses its way. Christie attempts to combine clue-puzzle conventions with a super-villain spy conspiracy, and neither ‘plot’ reaches an entirely satisfactory conclusion. The detective story has hardly played fair with the reader, lurking in the background and depending upon the belated revelation of the FBI agent’s backstory, while the conspiracy narrative of the incarcerated scientists is undermined by the sheer efficiency of its criminal mastermind. Mr Aristide, the financier, is simply too good at his job, and the location of his secret bunker is only revealed through Andy’s escape disguised as a Moroccan servant, his face gleaming ‘black and oily’.⁶⁵ While the disguise is offensive to contemporary sensibilities, postwar sentiment might have been more troubled by the need to conclude Hilary’s plucky British adventure with an American intervention. This abrupt acknowledgement of the shifting postwar balance of power is one of many tensions that complicate the novel and threaten to defeat its capacity for comfortable generic resolution. On the one hand *Destination Unknown* deploys an impressive female agent, on the other it

clings ferociously to conventions of both femininity and national identity. It embraces a modernity of spycraft and rejects the power of science as ethically unstable. It lauds the value of women's work and cleaves to the convention of marriage. It demands the old war be forgotten, but nostalgically yearns for a time when wars could be won through muddle rather than mutually assured destruction.

The Hollow, *Taken at the Flood* and *Destination Unknown* are, then, three contrasting manifestations of Christie's postwar writing. All three are permeated by the preoccupations of the postwar, their characters and plotting shaped by the anxieties of a post-traumatic culture, yet each takes a different approach to the mediation of anxiety, and in so doing reveals the extent to which Christie remained a fundamentally modern writer. Nostalgia within her work is strategic: even when she loses the plot, her instincts are adaptive, changing her fiction to cater, more or less successfully, to the tastes of an evolving postwar readership. Over the approximate ten years described here, she supplements her familiar detective figures with a range of female agents and neurotic men, resisting or complicating a set of cultural imperatives that would denigrate the independent working woman. Generic form demands resolution, and marriage remains Christie's favoured strategy of reassurance, but these final couplings should not obscure the agency of women within the body of her narratives. These novels remain, above all, characterised by scepticism and detachment. In the postwar, as in the war, global events, however disturbing, are refracted rather than confronted. Christie likewise refuses authorial exposure, keeping politics at a distance, and leaving the reader with only a faint outline of the writer's possible convictions. Indeed, from these three novels perhaps only one idea escapes Christie's clinical self-censorship: a horror of irrational – or perhaps, immoderate – belief. In *The Hollow*, Henrietta succinctly observes that 'worship drives out personality'. Hilary Craven, trapped in a bunker with a bunch of hysterical and paranoid scientific believers, would likely say much the same thing.⁶⁶

This sense of detachment – a sign of Christie's own investment in the national language of emotional restraint and euphemism – returns us to Light's perception that the rhetoric of good and evil does not ring quite true in the novels. It also takes us back, unexpectedly, to Eco's analysis of James Bond. Exploring the multiple accusations of prejudice levelled at Fleming, Eco observes, beneath a veneer of British superiority, an underlying current not of ideology, but of pragmatism:

Thus arises the suspicion that our author does not characterise his creations in such and such a manner as a result of ideological opinion but purely for rhetorical purposes. By 'rhetoric' I mean an art of persuasion which relies on *endoxa*, that is, on the common opinions shared by the majority of readers.⁶⁷

Eco concludes that a 'man who chooses to write this way is neither a Fascist nor a racist; he is only a cynic, and expert in tale engineering'.⁶⁸ This is a pertinent statement for Christie's work, and for the specific context of the postwar. Christie's work from this period responds to the cultural imperative to 'get back

to normal' by recognising that there is no normal, and she gradually reconfigures her wartime fantasies to admit new anxieties and render them safe. While not wishing to suggest that Christie was a cynic, she was a writer skilled at the fictional repression and reordering of mess. Grief, demobilisation and atomic dystopias represent the new mess of a new era and Christie, as an 'expert in tale engineering', adopts, adapts and mutates her familiar practice to address these terrors and 'bring them to book'. It is this discreet adaptability that might begin to explain why Christie remained relevant, and *bestselling*, even as the clue-puzzle formula entered its twilight years.

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Notes

1. The phrase is taken from Umberto Eco's analysis of James Bond. Eco, 'Narrative Structures in Fleming', in Christoph Lindner (ed.), *The James Bond Phenomenon* (Manchester, 2003), p. 46.
2. Stephen Knight, 'Murder in Wartime', in Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (eds), *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain* (London, 1995), p. 162.
3. Adam Piette, *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry 1939–1945* (London, 1995), p. 2.
4. Elizabeth Bowen, 'Preface to *The Demon Lover*', in *Collected Impressions* (London, 1950), p. 48.
5. Writers making imaginative escapes included Evelyn Waugh, L. P. Harley, Nancy Mitford and Mervyn Peake, while Stephen Spender was amongst those rendered temporarily silent. Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* (Edinburgh, 2013), p. 39, pp. 149–76.
6. Laura Thompson's biography notes the significance of this period in Christie's career: 'It was around the middle of the twentieth century that Agatha became the phenomenon that is "Agatha Christie". In 1945 she was a successful author whose books would sell out a UK hardback print run of around twenty-five thousand copies. By 1950 she was estimated to have sold fifty million books world wide, and from then on her sales simply grew and grew.' Thompson, *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery* (London, 2007), p. 356.

7. The expanding field of mid-century studies has offered a valuable critique of the canon and critical practice through works as diverse as Alice Ferrebe, *Literature of the 1950s: Brave, New Causes* (Edinburgh, 2012) and Thomas S. Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York, 2016).
8. Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London, 1991), p. 69.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
10. *Ibid.*
11. For example, in the Miss Marple novel *The Moving Finger* (1943), the narrator is a wounded RAF pilot sent to recuperate in a small country town, while *The Body in the Library* (1942) features a seemingly dissolute young man hiding his Blitz heroism from public view.
12. The novel, by contrast, favoured the dangerously attractive figure of the commando: a repository of a mode of residual masculinity no longer welcome, and certainly not trusted, in the postwar world. See Victoria Stewart, '“Commando Consciousness” and Criminality in Post-Second World War Fiction', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 10:2 (2017), 165–77. An excellent account of the disorientation and cultural anxiety generated by demobilisation in Britain is provided by Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (New Haven, 2009).
13. The group hero – both male and female – was a symbol of wartime co-operation across boundaries of class, region, nation and education, and was a key feature of documentary realist films such as *The Foreman Went to France* (1942), *Millions Like Us* (1943) and *The Way Ahead* (1944).
14. There has been extensive discussion of the clue-puzzle formula as a feminised form. See, for example, Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (London, 1980); Light, *Forever England* and Merja Makinen, *Agatha Christie: Investigating Femininity* (London, 2006).
15. Christie claimed, in her entertaining but unreliable autobiography, to regret her decision to create elderly detectives, observing that Poirot ‘must be well over a hundred by now’. Miss Marple, born in 1930 ‘at the age of sixty-five to seventy’, would similarly have been approaching her centenary. Agatha Christie, *An Autobiography* (London, 1993 [1977]), p. 263, 450. Christie started the *Autobiography* during the war, but did not finish it until 1965 (when she was seventy-five). It was published, a year after her death, in 1977. I’m grateful to the reviewer who succinctly noted that it too is a text working to make sense of the postwar.
16. *Partners in Crime* (1929) was an exercise in detective pastiche, in which Tommy and Tuppence attempt to solve cases using the methodology of other popular fictional characters.
17. Light, *Forever England*, pp. 8–9.
18. ‘The language of good and evil in the fiction feels “trumped up” and reads like a mere reflex... Since the effect of the plots has been to divorce moral and aesthetic feeling and to discourage identification, we can hardly feel terror or relief on behalf of the characters.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 101)
19. Marion Shaw and Sabine Vanacker, *Reflecting on Miss Marple* (London, 1991), p. 3, p. 77.
20. Laura Thompson notes these contradictions, for example in *Taken at the Flood* where Poirot insists on both the mutability and the absolute fixity of character. Christie seems to have believed in some form of essential nature, but it cannot be assumed that such beliefs transfer transparently into her texts. ‘[A]lthough she held strong opinions’, writes Thompson, ‘it was her writerly strength to be able to doubt them’. *Agatha Christie*, p. 53, 86.

21. As the autobiography observes, what was normal for the middle classes changes out of all proportion over the course of Christie's lifetime, and it's difficult to determine whether she was nostalgic for a pre-war past. On the one hand, domestic staff disappear making life harder for women of her class; on the other, cars become ubiquitous and relatively cheap, offering greater independence to women.
22. I read Knight's choice of 'superintend' as a synonym for both inspection and control. Christie surveys postwar culture and, with the aid of generic convention, seeks to manage and reorder it.
23. Agatha Christie, *The Hollow* (London, 2002 [1946]), p. 276.
24. Agatha Christie, *The Moving Finger* (London, 1948 [1943]), p. 189.
25. Christie, *The Hollow*, p. 230.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 275–6. Changing attitudes to death across the war years are discussed in Gill Plain, "'A Stiff is Still a Stiff in this Country': The Problem of Murder in Wartime", in Petra Rau (ed.), *Bodies-at-War: Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 104–23. Fears about the desensitising impact of war were expressed at the time by George Orwell in 'The Decline of the English Murder', and are explored at length in Allport, *Demobbed* (2009).
27. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
28. Knight's invocation of Jane Austen in my epigraph resonates here: it seems that only the demands of propriety prevent Lucy from herself getting rid of the inconvenient people who stand in the way of securing the inheritance of Ainswick, the novel's nostalgically remembered, but never actually represented, equivalent of Pemberley. Parallels with Austen can be extended further. Mary Evans, for example, begins her study *The Imagination of Evil* (London, 2009) with a consideration of Austen's mapping of society and its deceptions. It is also worth noting that, while detective fiction was considered an excellent distraction from bombing, the most popular author of the war years was Jane Austen.
29. Christie, *An Autobiography*, pp. 489–90.
30. Christie, *The Hollow*, p. 374.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 369.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 383.
34. William Watkin, *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature* (Edinburgh, 2004), p. 50.
35. The challenge of grieving, and managing traumatic experiences, in a culture of reticence was exacerbated by misguided medical orthodoxy. As Marina MacKay notes in her study of the literary critic and Far East prisoner of war Ian Watt, 'The received wisdom on dealing with returned prisoners in 1945 was to encourage them to avoid speaking about their experiences.' Families, too, were advised not to ask questions of the men who returned. Marina MacKay, *Ian Watt: The Novel and the Wartime Critic* (Oxford, 2018), p. 43.
36. Christie, *The Hollow*, p. 367.
37. Agatha Christie, *Taken at the Flood* (London, 1961 [1948]), p. 38.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 37. This point is reiterated throughout the book. Superintendent Spence, for example, 'endorsed the common opinion that...[David] was one of those young fire-brand commandos who, though they had had their uses in time of war, were to be looked at askance in peace-time', pp. 90–91.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

40. These material conditions in turn play a role in understanding Christie's exceptional appeal in the postwar years. Drawing on a range of sources, including the Mass Observation archive, Claire Langhamer argues that the war generated 'an intensified romance with home life' imagined in terms of privacy, stability, comfort and relaxation ('The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40:2 (2005), 348). Christie's novels – fantasies of order in which the appeal and importance of home is always understood – are exemplary fictions of a world fixated upon the idea, however ill-defined, of 'getting back to normal'. David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* (London, 2007), p. 49, p. 80.
41. Christie, *Taken at the Flood*, p. 80.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
44. *Ibid.*
45. See Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*, pp. 214–18, for discussion of *A Diary for Timothy*. The concerted cultural effort to reinscribe masculinity and generate a viable postwar 'domestic citizen' is mapped by Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).
46. Christie, *Taken at the Flood*, p. 180.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
49. Allport, *Demobbed*, p. 2, pp. 95–7.
50. The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place on 2 June 1953. Rationing, which had worsened during the late 1940s, finally ended in 1954. The belief in the dawn of a new era is encapsulated by Philip Gibbs's celebratory volume, *The New Elizabethans* (London, 1953).
51. Christine Geraghty and Neil Rattigan provide useful accounts of transitions in cinematic representations of the war. Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties* (London, 2000), pp. 175–95; Rattigan, 'The Last Gasp of the Middle Class: British War Films in the 1950s', in Winston Wheeler Dixon (ed.), *Reviewing British Cinema 1900–1992* (New York, 1994).
52. Agatha Christie, *Destination Unknown* (London, 1959 [1954]), p. 35.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–4.
55. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London, 1993).
56. Christie, *Destination*, p. 136.
57. Writers from Evelyn Waugh to George Orwell expressed their ambivalence about 'planning' in their fiction of the late 1940s. J. B. Priestley, by contrast, was committed to the ideal, even as he used it for comic effect in his demobilisation novel *Three Men in New Suits*.
58. Christie, *Destination*, p. 93.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
62. The first book in the series, *Casino Royale*, appeared in 1953.
63. Eco, 'Narrative Structures', p. 43.
64. Christie, *Destination*, p. 92.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

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66. Indeed, to Christie the only viable religion is one characterised by understatement and restraint, and that believes in the moral value of crime fiction: Anglicanism. Notably, in *A Murder is Announced* (1950), reading *Death Does the Hat Trick* inspires vicar Julian Harmon to an unusually lucid sermon.
67. Eco, 'Narrative Structures', p. 45.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 46.